

Pastor Jim Lloyd

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Title: The Wisdom of The Hyrax: Strategic Living

Text: Proverbs 30:26

Hyraxes are found in the Middle East or in eastern Africa. Except for a few zoos, the hyrax lives only in that part of the world. When the King James Bible was being translated (17th century), the translators didn't even know what the hyrax was, so they used the word "coney." Other translations have used the word badger, rock badger, rabbit, and coney. The hyrax looks a little like a rabbit, a badger, or a rodent, or maybe a guinea pig on steroids. One source said that they spend 95% of their time doing what we would call "hanging out" – just laying around in the sun taking it easy. But that's not why Solomon said they were wise. The hyrax is small. The biggest are about two feet long. However, I've read that there is fossil evidence of ages past that seem to indicate that some species were as big as a pony! Hyraxes communicate with one another by using 21 identifiable vocalizations that include yips, grunts, wails, and snorts. And they even whistle. Another unique feature is that they have padded feet that are prone to sweat. This gives their paws a suction-cup like quality, making them sure-footed rock climbers. The National Zoo curator told Diane and I that they also have a concave paw which would also give it a suction-cup like quality.

Now, let's take a look at what Solomon said about the hyrax. "*Hyraxes – they aren't powerful, but they make their homes among the rocks.*" I have read Proverbs 30 many times, however, I typically just breezed through these verses, this one in particular, because I didn't really know anything about the animal and I didn't understand what was so wise about living among the rocks. The wisdom of the hyrax is that it knows what it takes to survive. In fact, hyraxes don't merely survive – they thrive. You could say that the hyrax knows how to live the good life. Now, the fact is, this little animal has more than its share of predators. The cobra, python, mountain lion, lynx, wild dogs, wolves, caracals, servals, civets, and mostly the eagle all consider the hyrax their prey. In spite of this, the hyrax have learned how to avoid danger and live safely. What can we learn from these little animals? We too can learn how to survive, and even thrive, in spite of the fact that the world is filled with problems and predators and things that go bump in the night.

The Bible tells us that we have an enemy – "*Satan's like a roaring lion, roaming to and fro, seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Peter 5:8). Hannah was watching a TV show on badgers this week. She had her mother, Pastor Rachel, take down some notes for me. They learned that the lion is afraid of the hissing of the badger. The program also indicated that badgers are one of the toughest animals in Africa (more so than even the lion), and that they will go up against creatures MUCH bigger than they. There's a YouTube video where a hyrax takes on a baboon twice its size! The Bible says that "*we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers.*" However, in spite of the fact that you and I live in a spiritual war zone, and in spite of the fact that most people around you will fall victim to the enemy's schemes, the truth is that together you and I WITH GOD can survive and even thrive, in spite of it all. The hyrax is the preferred menu item of half the animal kingdom. They have more than their fair share of natural enemies, but that doesn't stop them from enjoying the good life. Why? Because the hyrax has a system in place – strategic checkpoints to ensure that the essentials of life are taken care of.

Today I want to talk to you about these three checkpoints. These are three levels of security that every person needs to make sure they have in place.

- 1. Know Who to Listen To.** Earlier I mentioned that the hyrax communicates via 21 different vocalizations. One of them is a warning cry that they send whenever danger is near. The hyrax community will often post a sentry near their dwelling place to keep a lookout for predators. When the sentry sounds the warning, hyraxes have learned to listen. When they hear his cry, they scatter to a safe place. We encounter all kinds of warnings every day. Many of them we've learned to ignore (warnings on packages, etc.). But there are some warnings we need to heed. The wise among us know WHO the sentry is and they know WHEN to pay attention. When your doctor tells you, "You're heading for a heart attack," – the wise will hear it and heed the warning. When your spouse says, "We need to talk," – the wise hear and pay attention. When the things your teenager says doesn't add up and their behavior doesn't measure up – the wise parent will notice and will take the necessary action. Here's what I'm saying – the hyrax knows how to survive, and even thrive, because in the midst of all the community's chatter, HE KNOWS WHO TO LISTEN TO. He understands that he can't make it on his own. He needs others in his life who are looking out for him, and he needs to listen to what they say. We would also do well to note who NOT to listen to. Some who speak into your life are not speaking for your gain or benefit. Some speak out of a selfish motive – their gain. Make sure the one you listen to is really looking out for your good. NOTE TOO: When

they speak for your good, it might NOT be what you WANT to hear, but it may well be what you NEED to hear.

2. **Stay Connected.** I've read that the hyrax communities typically number between 50-80, and they are the first non-human species in which structural balance is the norm. What that means is that they follow the rule – "the friend of my friend, is also my friend." It appears that the hyrax invented social networking (or they were at least on the ground floor). The hyrax culture is all about community – and it's a community with an egalitarian structure. That means that everyone is the same as everyone else. They don't look down on one another. The hyrax understands that we're all in this together, so we NEED to look out for one another. *Illustration:* Viktor Frankl is a man that knows what it means to survive. He spent about three years in a Nazi death camp. He was the only member of his family to make it out alive. Years later, when he wrote *Man's Search for Meaning*, he explored the question: What are our deepest needs? He determined: We need to be in relationships where we're unconditionally loved, where we know that we're being looked after and taken care of, we need to know how to love unconditionally, and part of our responsibility is to nurture, look after and take care of others. These relationships don't just happen by accident. You have to seek them out. Just because you live in a family doesn't mean that you're living in community with them. And just because you're part of a church doesn't mean that you're living in community with them. We need more than just to share space with other people. We need people with whom we can share our lives – people to whom we both give and receive. There's a Greek word that's used about 20 times in the New Testament – a word with a special meaning for the church today. The word is KOINONIA. It describes people living together in a state of community – joint participation, sharing, and intimacy. Its first use is in Acts 2:42-47, where Luke describes life in the early church – "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ...They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.*" This is how the church started, and this has always been God's ideal for the church. He wants us to stay connected – to look out for each other. We need each other. If you've been trying to carve out your own isolated existence, to be your own little island, you need to know that you will never survive life in the wild, not unless you stay connected to others. Everyone needs to be part of a group that laughs with you and cries with you. You need that bond of community – koinonia. And, when you're part of such a group, you need to laugh with them and cry with them, too, because that's what being in a group is all about. This is why Sunday School classes, Home Bible Studies, and Small Groups (cell groups, life groups) are such a great idea. It's not just about what we learn from the lesson book, it's about what we experience in communion with others. This leads to the third strategic checkpoint. The kind of koinonia I'm talking about is two-dimensional. It's vertical AND horizontal. Not only should we be growing closer to one another, we should be growing closer to God.
3. **Know When to Run To The Rocks.** Earlier I mentioned that the hyrax has padded, sweaty feet with a suction-cup quality to them, making them adept at rock-climbing. Hyraxes have learned that this unique skill puts them at an advantage over their enemies. As a result, they have learned that the rocks are the safest place for them to be. Psalm 104:18 says, "...*the rocks form a refuge for the hyraxes.*" So it only makes sense that when danger appears, they all run to the rocks and take their refuge. That's what we need to do. When trouble appears, we need to run to the rocks, or rather run to THE ROCK – the Rock of our salvation. The One whom the King James Version calls "*the rock that is higher than I.*" That's where we need to run, and when we run, we need to take as many with us as possible. If your family is in trouble, you need to know it's time to run to THE ROCK. And if you can, get the rest of your family to run with you. When churches face conflict, opposition, or a financial crisis – they (we) need to run to THE ROCK and huddle up in safety. This needs to be our reaction in any difficult situation. God is our Refuge – our Safety Net. When trouble is near, move in His direction in every possible way. Just like the feet of the hyrax are biologically disposed to life on the rocks, it's in your DNA too. When you're living near THE ROCK, your life works so much better.
4. **Conclusion.** We have enemies all around us. The world is not a very safe and friendly place. Life can get rather tough. We can't afford to hide our heads in the sand AND God doesn't expect us to go through life paranoid and afraid every moment of every day. He made you to survive life's toughest moments – and not just survive, but THRIVE! He created you to live a life full of meaning and adventure. Let's be like this community of little furry creatures. Let's make our home together near THE ROCK and let's spend our lives looking out for each other.